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CONDITIONS OF AGGRESSIVENESS IN US PRESIDENTIAL AND UK PRIME

MINISTER NEWS CONFERENCES, 2002-2009

A Thesis in

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ABSTRACT

Dominating the discourse on the nature of press-state relations is the use of a "model" paradigm that seeks to subsume all of the nuanced dimensions of press behavior into concise models of the press. These models tend to operate on a single dimension used to capture the degree of oppositional (or subservient) behavior, leading to the formation of simplistic interpretations. In order to highlight the nuances of press-state relations, this study draws comparisons between two relatively similar press systems by isolating the conditions associated with aggressive (or subservient) journalism. Data were drawn from US presidential and UK prime minister news conferences from 2002 -2009 which identified features of aggressive questioning. Results showed that, at the individual level, neither the US nor the UK were closely attuned to a particular model of press behavior, and that, when comparing the two press systems, US journalists are systematically more aggressive than UK journalists, while UK journalists are more responsive to prevailing social conditions. I conclude by discussing the theoretical implications of my findings, which serve to diminish the utility of the "model" approach to media studies, while also suggesting that, due to the changing structure of communications, the ways in which the press respond to public interests may be shifting in a new direction.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Brief Statement of the Problem

When studying the existing and historical relationships between press systems and the

state, it is difficult to move beyond the dominant paradigm of research which focuses primarily

upon specific "models" of press behavior. This form of analysis attempts to characterize features

both within and between national press systems in order generate comparisons between press

systems and to identify and demarcate various historical periods occurring between the press and

the state. While useful, this form of analysis can simplify and hide the glaring differences

between similar press systems, and can mask general long term trends of press behavior across

time. In an effort to address this issue, it becomes clear that more micro forms of analysis need to

be introduced into media studies, in order to highlight the limitations of the "model" paradigm.

Previous micro-level research has been undertaken which explores the relationships that arise

between the state, the press and society at-large, and has served to limit the applicability of

within-press "models" of behavior. This series of studies focused primarily of the micro-features

of aggressive questioning in Presidential news conferences, and served to identify specific

features of aggressive questioning, which were then analyzed along with "social context"

variables to test the applicability of the existing normative models of US press behavior

(Clayman and Heritage 2002b; Clayman et al. 2006; Clayman et al. 2007). Their findings, which

will be discussed in detail later, demonstrated rising levels of aggressiveness overall, but also

provided evidence that the media does not necessarily directly respond to public concerns through

the channels associated with the "fourth estate" model of press behavior. This helped to

illuminate features of state-media relations in such a way as to evaluate existing theories on the

nature of mass media in the United States. To further the findings of this research, and to provide

greater depth to intra and inter-press system research, I plan to expand the scope of this analysis

on Presidential news conferences by conducting a cross-national comparative analysis of

conditions of journalist questioning aggressiveness in Presidential and Prime Minister news

conferences in the United States and the United Kingdom. The purpose of this research is

threefold, however, as the comparative nature of the analysis will serve to sharpen the distinctions

between two "similar" press systems, while also elucidating specific features of both the US and

UK culture of journalism as they are demonstrated in the executive press conference context.

Thus, beyond the primary goal of testing existing press "models," distinct features of each press

system are elaborated, providing a more precise picture of the shifting nature of press-state

relations. Hopefully, this will also serve to generally expand concepts in media studies, a goal that

is often championed by scholars of political communication (Pfetsch and Esser 2004). It should

be mentioned that the role the media play in determining the public agenda and operating as a

"fourth estate" in checking the power of the government is paramount in this study; the

implications of which may serve to either reinforce or challenge the dominant belief that both the

US and UK press systems serve as a guardian to the public interest, especially considering that

the issue of the relationship between the state and the media is one dealing with assumptions

regarding the autonomy of societal institutions (Alexander 1981) or institutional fields (Bourdieu

1993).

Background

Much of the prior research on the relationship between the state and the media operated

within an explicit paradigm that focuses upon US-specific concepts of autonomy and

accountability. This has led to the development of particular normative models of media-state

relations varying on a spectrum between media operating as an indiscriminate "junk-yard dog"

that is relentlessly antagonistic to the State (Bennett 2003), to a decidedly subservient "lap dog"

which limits its discourse to State-originated official press releases (Gans 1979, Epstein 1973,

Herman and Chomsky 1988) even in instances where reporters are in a position to witness events themselves (Livingston and Bennett 2003). Falling somewhere in-between these two models is the normative concept of the role of the media as a "watchdog" or a "fourth estate" that serves as a check to state power. Recent research has documented trends of an overall increasing amount of presentations of critical perspectives and the use of aggressive questioning, as seen through research on election news coverage (Hallin 1992), and more recently, in research on the role of the journalist in Presidential news conferences (Clayman et al. 2006, 2007; Clayman and Heritage 2002b).

Previous research on journalist aggressiveness conducted by Clayman et al. (2006, 2007; Clayman and Heritage 2002b) demonstrated the variability of journalist aggressiveness in Presidential news conferences while concurrently testing the specific models of journalist behavior. Their research, using a form of quantitative conversation analysis (QCA), in which aspects of question design were analyzed for specific indicators of aggressiveness, spanned almost half a century of data (1953-2000) to identify a linear trend of increasing aggressiveness across all dimensions measured. These dimensions include initiative, directness, assertiveness, adversarialness, and accountability (although the measures of both directness and accountability began to level off over time). The period of time examined covered the emergence of the routine and open Presidential news conference, encompassing the administrations of Eisenhower through Clinton. More recently, their research was adapted to identify and explore specific conditions of journalist aggressiveness in Presidential news conferences, which focused around four "types" of contexts: the administration lifecycle, Presidential popularity, the economic context, and foreign affairs.

The "administration lifecycle" context was developed to test whether or not Presidential news coverage followed identifiable phases, as hypothesized by Grossman and Kumar (1979). According to the hypothesis, there was supposed to be a "honeymoon" period following the beginning of a new presidency, with increasing levels of aggressiveness appearing over time. This

context also included a measure for the time lag since the previous conference, with the hypothesis that journalists may be more inclined to punish Presidents who have become inaccessible to the media. However, their results demonstrated that most of the intra-administration chronological variables were insignificant, although there were identifiable increases in aggressiveness (directness specifically) common in the second term.

The effect of Presidential popularity was included to test specifically the "watchdog" model of media, for it was hypothesized that within such a model, journalists would become more critical and aggressive in response to public opinion. However, Presidential popularity as measured by Gallup job approval rating polls did not prove to be a significant predictor of any aspect of aggressive questioning, although it was speculated that this may have been due to the strong bivariate correlation between this measure, and measures found within the "economic context".

Another set of indicators used to test the media's role as a watchdog was subsumed under the "economic context," and consisted of measures for the US prime interest rate, the US consumer price index (CPI), the Dow Jones index, and the US unemployment rate, with the hypothesis that journalists would indeed become more aggressive in contexts which the economy was a salient factor in political life. Results did support their hypotheses on some level, although it only showed mild associations between the prime interest rate, and increased assertiveness and adversarialness. The unemployment rate was also moderately associated with increased aggressiveness across all dimensions except for directness.

The foreign affairs context was included to test for a "rally round the flag" effect in which journalists would demonstrate more deference when dealing with foreign or military questions. The results showed that, indeed, questions concerning foreign or military affairs were less assertive, less adversarial, and pushed for less accountability than for questions concerning domestic affairs. This effect remained strong and stable across other dimensions as well, including various economic and temporal contexts.

Lastly, the research conducted by Clayman et al. (2006, 2007), as mentioned before, demonstrated secular trends over time, even while controlling for the other variables. The results indicated a mild to moderate increase over time for all dimensions of aggressiveness except for assertiveness.

It is clear from this research that the ways in which journalists regulate their behavior does not fall into any particular model of US media-state relations, and that the relationship between journalists and the top executive power is a varied and complex one requiring additional study, as in many ways, the behavior of journalists in Presidential news conferences reflected aspects of various models. However, as mentioned before, the question arises as to the applicability of this paradigm of investigation. The paradigm in question is that of US media-state relations, as it is based around specific historical processes which have already, and which continue to, shape the relationship between the institutions of the State and the media.

Research by Werder (2002) and Brossard et al. (2004) has already demonstrated that the applicability of traditionally oriented US-media concepts was limited, even in various European countries, which have often developed out of similar democratic traditions. The applicability of such concepts was contingent based upon features of specific media systems as well as the various social, political, and cultural forces shaping the country of analysis. Werder (2002) argued for the importance of applying predominantly US-oriented media theories to other national and sociopolitical contexts in order to broaden the scope of such theories while simultaneously challenging the theory's construction. It is for that reason that I endeavor to expand the research conducted by Clayman et al. (2006, 2007) to incorporate a cross-national comparative study of journalist questioning aggressiveness in "executive" (I will henceforth use this term to describe comparable leaders of the state) news conferences, in order to reinforce the understanding of the processes influencing media-state relations.

Selection criteria for comparability are explicitly important when conducting cross-national comparative analyses, as the development of a framework of comparison needs to be

logical, and not based upon arbitrary features. For that reason, I have chosen to adopt the "most similar design" approach (Peter and de Vreese 2003: 49) that operates in such as way as to reduce the number of probable interactions resulting from fundamental differences between dissimilar countries. These interactions can lead to muddled results, making it difficult to account for potentially casual relationships between the media systems and the outcome being analyzed. Because of this, I have opted to conduct my comparative analysis between the United States and the United Kingdom, due to the fact that both countries operate as open democracies with similar sensitivities to the role of the state as it relates to individual rights, liberties and freedoms (Dardis 2006: 411). The US, arising out of a context of political traditions similar to the of the UK, operationalized these traditions in their conceptualization of the media and the role it plays in maintaining ideals of freedom by functioning as a "fourth estate" to check the power of government. Based upon this reasoning, the media should be operating relatively free from government censorship and other government interference. This has led to both media systems adopting a generally more critical and/or antagonistic position, particularly as they relate to the media systems of other nations (Esser et al. 2001).

In their development of a framework for comparing media systems, Hallin and Mancini (2004) adopted a similar perspective on the similarities between the US and UK media systems. Based upon their criteria for comparability, Hallin and Mancini subsumed both the United States and the United Kingdom into a single model; namely the "Liberal" model of the media. The framework for this model demonstrated that both the US and UK models of the media contained early development of commercial papers, with their expansion involving minute state involvement, especially considering that British press institutions were exported to the US (Hallin and Mancini 2004: 201). Both media systems are dominated by an informational style of journalism, with traditions of political neutrality operating strongly. It should be noted, however, that in the UK there is a distinct tradition of political parallelisms between certain British newspapers and British political structures. More importantly, journalistic professionalism is

strongly cultivated in both cultures, with strong traditions of objectivity operating as the primary feature of journalist behavior. Finally, both media systems are market-dominated with high levels of ownership concentration (Kuhn 2007), meaning that the media is often commercial and operating without financial support from the state. An exception to that point is the tradition of public broadcasting in the UK, which operates at such a level as to be incomparable to the public broadcasting institution as it functions in the US (Kuhn 2007: 42).

Regardless of these similarities between the media systems of the US and the UK, there exists specific dimensions of the UK political structure that need to be discussed in order to define the context of the cross-national comparison, as the roles of the media and the press are not necessarily the same in the US and UK (McNair 2003; Conboy 2004). Particularly important to the research in question has been the significant increase in the size of the political public sphere, due to the vast quantity of political information, analysis, and interpretation available in public circulation at any given time (McNair 2000: 15-41). Not considering the fact that this growth has been uneven the various aspects of media, this growth has largely been attributed to the relaxation of regulations of political speech and neutrality as well as the increased commercialization of media in the UK in general. This has led to other outcomes as well, as McNair (2000) has identified an increasing amount of movement away from deferential treatment of politicians in interviews, to increasing levels of overall aggressiveness. More importantly, journalistic deference appears to have become the least valuable trait among political interviewers. One of the reasons offered for this shift has been the increasing competition in broadcast news generated between the BBCand the Independent Television service (ITV). Another has been the increasing routinization of the institution of "Question Time" in Parliament.

"Question Time" as it exists in British politics is an aspect of the political procedure that does not have a directly comparable characteristic in US politics. It occurs in the House of Commons and is the place in which the Prime Minister should announce important news and be held to account for particular policies and actions (Seymour-Ure 2003). In this way, the public,

through the voice of elected officials, are in a position to question the Prime Minister (the executive power). However, since the introduction of cameras into "Question Time", the entire exchange has become more ritualized and tightly controlled, leading to the introduction of media organizations as the rhetorical foci of political culture (McNair 2000 : 89-92). Journalist have responded to this decline in critical accountability by forming a surrogate opposition to the government, generating enhanced significance in subjecting politicians to democratic accountability as it is defined by the standards established by the mass media.

In his extensive work on defining the UK media system, Raymond Kuhn (2007), identified five roles in which the media play in British politics, including: information provision, agenda-setting, public watchdog, political mobilization, and regime legitimization. Within these roles, we find a similar dynamic to the roles discussed earlier to define media-state relations in the US. Most obvious is the normative role of the media as a public watchdog that acts a check of the government, and makes political actors accountable to the public. Much as it is in the US, the media in the UK have also been criticized for perceived indiscriminate, ratings-minded critical behaviors, similar to that of the "junk-yard dog" model of US media. The "lapdog" model of US media also encompasses the other roles discussed by Kuhn, especially that of information provision, as it operates primarily in a top-down manner, and regime legitimization.

As it pertains to this study, in which specific conditions are to be examined within both the US and the UK, the same conditions outlined by Clayman et al. (2007) appear to have a demonstrable effect upon media behaviors in the UK. Prior research has shown increased aggressiveness in scandal related reporting in the UK, particularly when coupled with dramatic economic events (Tumber 2004). This aggressiveness has also been linked to poll ratings of governments and political parties in relation to scandal reporting. Tumber (2004) also hypothesized the existence of a honeymoon period in media-state relations in the UK. Robinson, Goddard, and Parry (2003) demonstrated that, more often than not, British newspapers tended to maintain the agenda promoted during Coalition briefings throughout the Iraq War, suggesting

deference to foreign or military issues. Based upon the results of these studies, the same conditions examined by Clayman et al. (2007) should be predictive of journalist questioning aggressiveness in Prime Minister news conferences. However, does the similar trend in rising levels of aggressiveness mean that both US and UK journalists operate in a similar fashion in the context of the executive news conference? Alternatively, does the cultural and political history that constructed journalist deference as an undesirable trait produce higher levels of aggressiveness in the UK as opposed to the US?

The Executive Press Conference

Although there already exists a long tradition of studying US Presidential news conferences and the evolution of media-state relations (e.g. Cornwell 1965; French 1982, Smith 1990), research on UK Prime Minister news conferences is limited at best (e.g. McKenzie 2005), nor does there appear to be any comparative analysis involving more than a single nation's news conference. However, although the executive news conference operates as a vital interface between the chief executive and the media (Clayman et al. 2007), the development and traditions of the executive news conference are dramatically different between the United States and the United Kingdom.

In the United States, the Presidential news conference has functioned as a fixture of both journalism and politics since the early decades of the twentieth century. Schudson (1978, 1982) demonstrated that the emergence of the Presidential news conference concurred with the increasing level of journalistic professionalism, while Kernell (1986) also showed how the Presidential news conference developed in relation to the President's enhanced interest in public opinion. It has been through this medium of the Presidential news conference that the ritual of political accountability developed, and Presidents were expected to explicate upon their various policy initiatives before a public audience (Alexander 1988, Dayan and Katz 1992). The structure of the Presidential news conference has remained relatively stable throughout the period

of analysis conducted by Clayman et al. (2006, 2007), which ranged from 1953 to 2000. In this conference format, a large number of journalists participate, and the most common method for establishing turns to talk involved the President making the selection as the process occurred. Journalist questions were usually developed in advance, leading to a lack of any specific narrative throughout the news conference. This meant that questions usually existed independent of one another except in instances where follow-up questions were asked. Because the President decides upon which journalists to call upon, he may avoid journalists who are decidedly aggressive, which could inhibit the behavior of other journalists, and prevent them from displaying aggressive tendencies. However, the President very rarely selects the same person twice in a conference, which suggests that he may not have the opportunity to always neglect aggressive journalists.

Unlike the US, the UK does not have a long history of established Prime Minister news conferences. It was not until June of 2002 that Prime Minister Blair introduced the American model of news conferences (Seymour-Ure 2003: 169). According to Seymour-Ure (2003), Prime Ministers still gave various conferences on specific topics to specific audiences, such as during elections or for visiting officials. However, these conferences were not regular, nor did they deal with wide ranging-issues, and most importantly, they tended not to be open for public record. Beginning in the 1980s, there was a relaxation of rules concerning political broadcasting, which allowed for more broadcast press conferences, although many of these tended to still be off the record. Eventually this led to the introduction of the "Downing Street Doorsteps;" micro-conferences that occurred when the Prime Minister was either leaving or returning to their office on Downing Street. This practice was begun by Prime Minister Thatcher, and continued through the Prime Ministries of both Major and Blair. Independent of this was the Westminster Lobby, a formal collection of journalists who usually worked with the Press Secretary, although they were and are often restricted from providing direct quotations (Hennessey and Walker 1987).

The eventual establishment of regular Prime Minister news conferences can be traced through the first few open conferences held by Prime Minister Major and by Prime Minister Blair. During the entirety of his administration, Major held only two open news conferences, while Blair began having unscheduled Prime Minister news conferences in 2000 to address specific crisis situations. Blair used these conferences as a way of addressing the public directly in order to demonstrate that his administration was a "listening government," although many of the questions asked were markedly non-challenging (Seymour-Ure 2003: 188). Eventually, this led to the Blair's first regular and open Prime Minister news conference, with a total audience of ninety journalists and political commentators.

But why had the American model of Presidential news conferences not been adopted earlier in the UK? According to Seymour-Ure (2003), conventional wisdom regarding the collective Cabinet government remained relatively constant until the end of the twentieth century. Individual Ministers were to be responsible for their own media relations within their own departments, meaning that the role of the Prime Minister was to coordinate the individual Ministers. Greater openness in both the government and the media demonstrated that, contrary to existing conventional wisdom, there was indeed a significant level of Prime Ministerial dominance and Presidential tendencies. The House of Commons also served as an avenue for accountability, but as mentioned earlier, the introduction of cameras to the Question Time in Parliament led to greater levels of routinization and decreased levels of critical interrogation. Accordingly, Prime Ministers began to have less and less involvement with Parliament, creating a need for a forum of accountability. As Stanyer (2003) argued, the introduction of the US-style news conference occurred as a result of negotiations between the press and the government in order to address the lack of an adequate forum of accountability. By 2000, the press had dramatically increased their role in "attack journalism," leading to a poor reaction by the UK government. In order to settle their heightened antagonisms, the UK government introduced

regular and open Prime Minister news conferences as part of an initiative to establish more direct communication with the public.

Although the development of the executive news conference followed distinctly different paths in the US and the UK, by 2002 they began following similar patterns of interaction. This allows for the establishment of a conceptual and comparative framework of executive news conferences, in order to capture patterns of journalist behavior through the use of conversation content analysis.

Conversation Content Analysis

As Clayman et al. (2007: 27) describes it:

Conversation analysis (CA) is the dominant approach to the study of language use and talk in interaction across the social sciences. It investigates patterns of social interaction for evidence of practices of conduct that exhibit systematic design- design associated with the production of intelligible social actions and organized sequences of actions.

Of course, identification of an action as systematic requires that the action must be recurring, contextually positioned, and attract responses the discriminate them from analogous practices. Central to this conceptual framework for understanding talk in interaction is the fact that the analysis of a given action or practice can be corroborated by placing it into contextual alignment with the other's response.

Integrating the analysis of the action and the environmental circumstances or outcomes in which the action arose may**,** according to the Clayman et al. (2007), require formal quantification and statistical analysis, as questions regarding whether talk has changed over time or whether it varies systematically with characteristics of the social environment "typically cannot be answered any other way." This has led to the use of CA in contexts where the focus can be placed upon individual turns at talk (e.g. Boyd 1998; Heritage, Boyd and Kleinman 2001). Because quantitative measures of talk derived from prior CA findings are internally validated in

an "emic" sense (Pike 1967) and prove to have strong predictive and explanatory power value, it is important that the measures used in this research on aggressive questioning in news conferences have been developed through previous extensive research on question design in broadcast news interviews and other environments (Clayman et al. 2006, 2007; Clayman and Heritage 2002b). Essentially, this means that the interactants *do* recognize that various features of their talk can be considered as being "more aggressive" or "less direct." Furthermore, previous research has served to demonstrate the validity and reliability of these measures of talk (Clayman and Heritage 2002b; Clayman et al. 2006; Clayman et al. 2007).

Cross-National Comparative Analysis

Beyond the theoretical/conceptual basis through which the importance of executive news conferences and the understanding of QCA are derived, there is a significant historical and contemporary precedent concerning the theoretical and conceptual implications of cross-national comparative analysis and comparative analysis more generally (Ragin and Zaret 1983; Chang et al. 2001; Livingstone 2003). In mass communication theory, scholars are increasingly conducting cross-national research to explore the generality of common media theories and media paradigms, whereas, in research on political communication, researchers continue to advocate how crucial international comparison is in the investigation of diverse sociopolitical and/or media systems (Pfetsch and Esser 2004). This focus upon the importance of cross-national comparative analysis as a framework for exploration allows for an investigation of both the unique historical processes underlying state-press relations in the US and the UK and the differences that arise out of a similar context (the executive news conference).

Broader Implications

Prior research conducted by Clayman et al. (2006, 2007), demonstrated the importance of the Presidential news conference in understanding the relationship between the media and the state in a specific context. By utilizing this methodology and then expanding the scope conditions outlined in the previous research, I hope to test the applicability of such an approach to understanding the relationship between the media and the state outside of the realm of the US context, and to further develop a method that may prove valuable in comparative media studies in general. If this method of exploring journalist aggressiveness in executive news conferences proves to be a worthwhile framework for comparison (as I intend to demonstrate), it can then be used to explore contexts that are not as similar as the media systems in the US and the UK. Given a proper understanding of language and talk in action, comparable measures of aggressiveness in formal language patterns can be developed for languages beyond English to broaden the understanding of similarities or differences between unique media systems worldwide.

Apart from the benefit derived from the development of a new methodological tool for comparison, research on the nature of the relationship between the state and the press are fundamentally important to concepts involving crucial aspects of freedom and democracy, such as public opinion, freedom of the press, freedom of expression, and a government that responds to the public's needs. By exploring the way these concepts relate to how critical a journalist may be when questioning the head of state is of vital importance in understanding our own media system, as well as others. Considering that the "watchdog" model of the media acting as a counterweight to state power and as a voice for the public is very much an ideal one, the attempt to isolate how our media system, as well as other systems, operate within or outside this model is critical in fighting for progressive media policy and legislation.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1- Linear Trends

As mentioned earlier, evidence suggests not only an increasing level of aggressiveness in journalist questioning in the US, but in the UK as well. As a result, I hypothesize that during the period of June 2002 – May 2009, overall levels of journalist questioning aggressiveness in Presidential news conferences will increase at a rate similar to that found in prior research. However, for Prime Minister news conferences, levels of aggressive will start out high and will decrease mildly over time, as the regular news conference system becomes routine, and follows the patterns established by the UK Question Time.

Hypothesis 2- Context Effects

Administration Effects

Given that there is no reason to doubt the stability of previous findings for Presidential news conferences, I hypothesize that journalistic question aggressiveness will be mildly associated with the linear trend across the administration (the second term indicator was removed in that analysis for comparability). However, the associations between aggressiveness and the time lag and administration change indicators will remain insignificant. In regards to the UK Prime Minister news conferences, I hypothesize that journalist question aggressiveness will have a mild negative association with the linear trend (as it captures the hypothesized decline in aggressiveness over time in general). Although still included, the time lag indicator will likely remain insignificant, although the administration change indicator may also be negatively associated with aggressiveness, as there is a hypothesized "honeymoon" period in UK press-state relations.

Popularity

Following the lead on previous research, I hypothesize that the association between Presidential popularity in the US and journalist questioning aggressiveness will remain insignificant for similar reasons as prior research (its strong correlation with economic conditions).   In the UK, existing research suggests that this association should remain even when controlling from economic effects, so I hypothesize that Prime Minister popularity will be mildly associated journalist questioning aggressiveness in Prime Minister news conferences.

Economic Context

As outlined by Clayman et al. (2007), only two of the economic indicators- the prime interest rate and unemployment rate- were associated with journalist aggressive in US Presidential news conferences. I hypothesize that the nature of this association will remain. However, by retaining all measures in the model, I do hypothesize that measures of journalist aggressive questioning in UK Prime Minister news conferences will be mildly to moderately associated with all four measures outlined within the economic context, specifically because of the relatively recent emergence of the media in the UK as a forum for Prime Minister accountability.

Foreign Affairs

Existing evidence suggests that both the US and the UK media may become more deferential when dealing with issues concerning military or foreign affairs. Because of this, I hypothesize that, due to a "rally around the flag effect," both US and UK measures of journalist questioning aggressiveness in executive news conferences will be negatively associated with the foreign/military question indicator. However, in both instances,

interaction effects between economic contexts, time, and the foreign/military questions

indicator will not be significant.

Chapter 2

Methodology

Sample

My comparative study of the United States and the United Kingdom comprises the time span of June 2002 to June 2009, a period that essentially covers the emergence of routine open and/or broadcast Prime Minister news conferences in the United Kingdom (Semour-Ure 2003). In order to maintain a comparable timeframe between the United States and the United Kingdom, I have moved the analysis beyond the original 1953-2000 scope analyzed by Clayman et al., to a timeframe that also captures current trends in contemporary US news conferences as well. The timeframe established occurs during the administration of George W. Bush (2002-2009), as well as the transition into administration of Barack Obama (2009), while concurrently covering the administration of Tony Blair (2002-2007), as well as the transition into the administration of Gordon Brown (2007-2009).

Transcripts of the conferences being used for the analysis were obtained from two sources, *The American Presidency Project* and the public papers from *Number10.uk.gov.* Following the same framework established by Clayman et al, the sample of conferences will be staggered quarterly within each year, with the first conferences held after February 1st, April 1st, July 1st, and October 1st selected. This yielded a total of 53 conferences and a total of 2417 questions. Regardless of the fact that the frequency of conferences may vary over time, the quarterly sample allows for a greater ability to identify associations across secular trends.

Independent Variables

ADMINISTRATION EFFECTS. In order to investigate the possibility of within and between administration effects, the sample spans two shifts in administration, one for the United States and one for the United Kingdom. A single variable will be included to capture possible

administration effects which involves the inclusion of a binary indicator variable for each country of analysis capturing the shift in administration (**0** for Blair/Bush, **1** for Brown/Obama). Due to the limited time span under analysis, there is not enough data available to adequately test for within administration trends such as the "honeymoon effect."

POPULARITY. Following previous research, Presidential popularity has been operationalized as the Gallup Job Approval rating that most closely preceded the particular conference, and is based upon the response to the question, "Do you approve or disapprove of the way [name] is handling his job as President?" Prime Minister popularity has been operationalized using a composite measure that includes approval ratings from both The Guardian and Yougov that most closely preceded the conference being analyzed, and is based upon the response to the question, "Do you think [name] is doing well or badly as Prime Minister?" This measure is included to see if popular opinion is in any way related to journalist behavior in the executive press conference setting.

ECONOMIC CONTEXT. The economic context is constructed from types of indicators with country specific values, creating a total of 8 variables: (1a) the US prime interest rate and the (1b) UK Bank's base rate (obtained from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics and UK National Statistics), (2a-b) the respective US and UK inflation rates (obtained from consumer price index data), (3a) the Dow Jones Index and the (3b) FTSE 100 Index, and (4a-b) the respective unemployment rates. Each score will be standardized across the scope of the data with the rates or values in 2002 being relatively comparable to the rates or values in 2009. The four types of indicators were selected due to their applicability as a measure of conditions one or both aspects of the economy: the "Main Street" economy or the "Wall Street" economy. The prime interest/ base rates and stock market variables are to act as a proxy for conditions on "Wall Street," while the unemployment rate variables are to serve as a proxy for conditions on "Main Street." The inflation rate for both countries of analysis serves as an indicator of economic conditions within both aspects of the economy. While the rationale for including the respective unemployment

rates is clear, the other measures are included as indicators of economic health. The Prime Interest/Bank Base rate is indicative of both banks and government's response to economic conditions. If the interest rate were to be dropped, it suggests that economic conditions are unfavorable, while more stable or moderate interest rates suggests fair economic conditions. Thus, a drop in the interest rate should reflect poor economic health and may therefore influence journalist behavior. The Dow/FTSE Index also serves as a measure of economic health, as wild fluctuations (usually downward) are indicative of poor economic conditions. The inflation rate serves as both a general indicator of economic health as well as a proxy for conditions experienced by the general population. For selection purposes, the rates or values that most closely precede the conference being analyzed will be used.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS. In order to measure differences in question aggressiveness across different content, a single binary variable will be used to determine whether the question is referring to either a domestic issue, or a foreign/military issue. Interaction effects will also be tested for between content effects and time or significant economic variables.

SECULAR TRENDS. Previous research by Clayman et al. (2006) has identified a general trend of increasing journalist aggressiveness in Presidential news conferences over time. However, because the scope of the data being analyzed is so limited (2002-2009 for the UK), long-term trends within journalist behavior in Prime Minister news conferences cannot be determined. Regardless, it is still important to test for general linear trends in both the US and UK executive news conferences across the same time period in order to draw comparisons between the two systems. All the models will include a linear time variable (1 unit = 1 year). Quadratic time variables will also be included.

A summary of the independent variables are reported below in **Table 1**. A summary of all variable descriptives will be included in **Table 2 and 3** below.

Table 1: Independent Variables

Conditions	Independent Variables
Administration Effects	Administration change indicator
Popularity	Executive approval rating
Economic Context	Prime interest/ Base rate US Consumer price index/ UK Consumer price index Dow Jones index/ FTSE 100 Index US Unemployment rate/ UK Unemployment rate
Foreign Affairs	Domestic versus foreign/military questions Foreign Interactions
Secular Trends	Year Year-squared

Dependent Variables

The dependent variables in the analyses are constructed using the question analysis system developed by Clayman et al. (2006; see also Clayman and Heritage 2002b). This system reduces the variables of aggressive questioning into five outcome measures:

1. *Initiative:* the extent to which questions are enterprising rather than passive in their aims.

2. *Directness:* the extent to which questionings are blunt rather than cautious in raising issues.

3. *Assertiveness:* the extent to which questions invite a particular answer and are in that sense opinionated rather than neutral.

4. *Adversarialness:* the extent to which questions pursue an agenda in opposition to the President/prime minister or his administration.

5. *Accountability:* the extent to which questions explicitly ask the President/prime minister to justify his policies or actions.

Given the problems associated with drawing distinctions between the "form" or a question and its "content," the five measures are constructed to capture the processes of both. The first three measures (initiative, directness, and assertiveness) are all operationalized with a

concern for the "form" of question construction, while the last two measures (adversarialness and accountability) are primarily concerned with issues of content. A brief discussion of the coding system can be found below (also see **Table 4**); for a more elaborate discussion on how the coding system was devised, see Clayman et al. (2007); Clayman et al. (2006); Clayman and Heritage (2002b).

INITIATIVE. As a measure of initiative, three specific processes occurring within the executive news conference have been identified. (1) Questions with statements that construct a context for the question to follow, (2) the inclusion of more than a single question per turn to talk, or (3) the presence of a follow-up question immediately following the primary question all encompass journalist questioning practices that demonstrate higher levels of journalist initiative.

DIRECTNESS. To measure directness as a trait of journalistic questioning, patterns in the various "forms" of questioning can be found, which demonstrate a lack of an indirect or cautious stance towards the question. A salient indicator of journalist indirectness occurs when the journalist frames their inquiry with a self-referencing phrase such as "I would like to ask…," or "May I ask…" These self-referencing phrases denote a level of hesitancy in which the journalist's question is preceded by a virtual request for permission. The use of other-referencing frames, such as "Can you answer…," or "Would you answer…," is also indicative of indirect questioning practices, as they suggest deference to the executive's ability or willingness to answer the question(s). Thus, the inclusion or absence of either a self or other-referencing frame serves as a proxy for the level of directness encoded within the question. This measure, unlike the others included, captures levels of indirectness, meaning that higher scores on this scale demonstrate *lower* levels of aggression.

ASSERTIVENESS. Measures for assertiveness are limited strictly to yes/no questions (e.g. Are we violating Geneva Conventions?) as they provide the easiest assessment. The construction of yes/no questions can be tilted in such a way as to favor either a yes-or-no reply in two particularly ways. The first involves the presence of a prefatory statement (e.g., "*The*

international community has become increasingly concerned with US questioning tactics. Are we violating Geneva Conventions?) which conditions the response to the yes/no question. The second involves the construction of the linguistic form of the question itself, as the question can be negatively formulated in a manner that conditions a yes response (e.g., *Aren't* we violating the Geneva Conventions?).

ADVERSARIALNESS. In dealing with the content of the issue, maintaining an oppositional stance to the administration can occur in the preface of the question specifically, or encoded within the question in its entirety. In order to determine the presence and nature of adversarialness encoded within the question preface, three categories are established for guidelines. The first is whether or not question preface is adversarial/non-adversarial, while the other two determine two types of questions with an adversarial preface, specifically whether or not the adversarial preface is the focus of the question or whether or not the adversarial preface is presupposed. Questions with a presupposed adversarial preface are treated as being more adversarial, as they do not leave room for debate on the oppositional topic involved. Questions are also examined for overall adversarialness, as opposed to distinct preface adversarialness, and were deemed as such when the oppositional position permeates throughout the entire question.

ACCOUNTABILIY. To determine the presence and degree of accountability within a particular question, any question in which the executive is asked to explain or justify his policies is identified and coded into one of three categories, one of which is to denote the absence of accountability inquiry within the question. The other two categories involve the way in which the accountability inquiry is phrased: as either a "*Why did you…*" or a *"How did you…"* question. Questions beginning with "Why did you…" are deemed to be somewhat less aggressive, as they ask for a justification without prejudice, while "How did you…" questions are more aggressive, as they are accusatory, and suggest a critical position regarding the executive's ability to defend his policies and/or actions.

Table 2: US Descriptives

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Initiative	806	0.43	0.5	0	1
Directness	806	0.31	0.67	0	5
Assertiveness	806	0.41	0.78	0	3
Adversarialness	806	0.9	1.05	0	3
Accountability	806	0.08	0.37	0	2
Prime Interest Rate	806	5.9	1.73	3.25	8.25
Dow Index	806	10780.3	1709.42	7775.6	13912.94
Unemployment Rate	806	5.47	1.22	4.5	9.5
Consumer Price Index	806	198.84	11.06	179.9	218.8
Linear Trends	806	1326.91	727.14	1	2543
Foreign Affairs	806	0.52	0.5	0	1
Approval Rating	806	47.01	13.35	28	78

Table 3: UK Descriptives

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Initiative	1611	0.45	0.5	0	1
Directness	1611	0.31	0.79	0	5
Assertiveness	1611	0.41	0.83	0	3
Adversarialness	1611	0.56	0.97	0	4
Accountability	1611	0.08	0.33	0	2
Bank Base Rate	1611	4.25	1.09	0.5	5.75
FTSE Index	1611	4983.76	936.12	3692.4	6595.6
Unemployment Rate	1611	5.22	0.51	4.7	7.3
Consumer Price Index	1611	101.01	4.53	95.5	110.1
Linear Trends	1611	1164.68	741.49	1	2491
Foreign Affairs	1611	0.47	0.5	0	1
Approval Rating	1611	36.89	9.07	14	59

Table 4: The Question Analysis System

Measure	Item (Indicator)	Description	Item Values	Scale
Initiative	Statement Prefaces	Question preceded by statement(s)	0 No Preface 1 Preface	"1" if any two of three items is "1"; 0 otherwise
	Multiple Questions	2+ Questions in a single turn at talk	0 Single question 1 Multiple questions	
	Follow-Up Questions	Subsequent question by the same journalist	0 Not a follow-up question 1 Follow-up question	
Directness	Absence of Other-Referencing Frames	Frame refers to the executive's ability or willingness to answer	0 No frame 1 Can you/Could you 2 Will you/ would you	Sum of two items
	Absence of Self-Referencing Frames	Frame refers to journalist's intention or desire to talk	0 No frame 1 I wonder 2 I'd like to ask 3 Can/May I ask	
Assertiveness	Preface Tilt	Preface favors yes or no	0 No tilt 1 Innocuous tilt 2 Unfavorable tilt	Sum of two items
	Negative Questions	Isn't it…? Couldn't you…?	0 Not a negative question 1 Negative question	
Adversarialness	Preface Adversarialness	Question preface is oppositional	0 Nonadversarial preface 1 Adversarial preface focus of question 2 Adversarial preface presupposed	Sum of two items

Considering that four of the five measures include multiple indicators, it is necessary to collapse these into individual composite measures with higher values denoting practices that are more aggressive (with the exception of Directness) or multiple practices used in combination. Using this composite coding scheme to generate a total of five outcome measures creates a total of 4 ordinal variables (directness, assertiveness, adversarialness, and accountability) and 1 binary variable (initiative). Each of the measures (4 composites and 1 single indicator) are treated as ordinal variables, not assuming interval scale properties or a normal distribution. To test whether or not a single underlying construct is being measured ordinally throughout each scale, I will take the predicted outcomes from the time the conference was held using ordinal logistic regression and examine the test of the assumption of proportional odds.

In order to determine the reliability of the question analysis system within the context of this study, it should first be mentioned that the very analysis of relatively formal aspects of question design has been found to be highly reliable because the focus is not upon content-based coding categories, which tend to be more interpretive and require variable judgment to utilize (Krippendorff 1980). The question analysis system, on the other hand, remains stable in its applications, due to its clear-cut interpretations. To maintain intercoder reliability, a joint recoding of a subsample of 100 questions was conducted and yielded a Kappa value of .92, suggesting that both coders maintained relative similarity in their coding behavior across the entire dataset.

The validity of the question analysis system being utilized within the context of executive news conferences has already been subject to significant amount of prior research (Clayman and Heritage 2002b; Clayman et al. 2006; Clayman et al. 2007). Research on the formal features of question design has also been conducted, either upon journalistic questioning practices (Heritage 2002a, 2002b; Clayman and Heritage 2002a) or upon questioning practices in interactions generally (Pomerantz 1988; Raymond 2003; Blum-Kulka 1987; Brown and Levinson 1987; Clark and Schunk 1980; Van der Wijst 1995). Previous research has demonstrated that the specific features of aggressiveness being measured are understood by both interactants as aspects of aggressiveness in various forms, which in turn, presents

evidence that the specific features analyzed are indeed indicators of aggressiveness within journalist-executive interaction.

Statistical Analysis

Although previous research has shown that this form of data has proven unproblematic in terms of autocorrelation covering a period of 47 years and that because of the ordinal nature of the outcome variables, traditional tests and corrections for autocorrelation do not directly apply, tests for autocorrelation were still conducted. To do so, the outcome scales were treated as if they had interval properties with normally distributed residuals. Under these conditions, the Durbin -Watson test of serial correlation found no evidence of autocorrelation (p>.2) for any of the outcomes.

Following the same format as Clayman et al. (2006; 2007) in previous research, two forms of analyses were run to test for both levels of journalist aggressiveness and possible conditions of that aggressiveness.   The first form of analyses was limited to two straightforward ordinal logistic regression runs including only the time and time-squared variables for both of the comparable datasets (US and UK). Each will be analyzed separately for purposes of comparison, generating a total of 10 individual regression models. These results will be used to test for secular trends in journalist aggressiveness over time for both the US and UK datasets, and the results will also serve as the base model for the second portion of the analysis.

The second portion of the analysis will be conducted to test for the relationships between various social conditions and each of the five outcome measures of aggressiveness. Time and time-squared will also be included within this series of models, but might also drop out if either do not remain significant at p<.05. In order to determine the effect of the various social conditions outlined in Table 1 and discussed earlier, I will run a total of 19 sets of staged ordinal logistic regression.   Each set will contain all of the five outcome variables found in Table 2 and discussed earlier, generating a total of 95 individual regression models. Any factors that were not significant at p<.05 after correcting for multiple

testing across outcomes will be removed from subsequent models. See **Table 5** below for a summary of the parameterization of the second portion of the analyses.

Table 5: Sets of Regression Models

Model Set	US Independent Variables	UK Independent Variables
01 (Base models)	Year, Year-squared	Year, Year-squared
02	Model Set 1 + US Prime Interest Rate	Model Set 1 + UK Bank Base Rate
03	Model Set 1 + US Consumer Price Index	Model Set 1 + UK Consumer Price Index
04	**Model Set 1 + Dow Jones Average - Fimal**	Model Set 1 + FTSE 100 Index Average
05	Model Set 1 + US Unemployment	Model Set 1 + UK Unemployment
06	Model Set 4 + Approval Poll	Model Set 1 + Unemployment and Base Rate
07	Model Set 4 + Foreign Indicator	**Model Set 6+ Foreign Indicator -Final**
08	Model Set 4 + Administration Change	Model Set 7+ Foreign X Time
09	----	Model Set 7 + Foreign X Unemployment
10	----	Model Set 7 + Foreign X Bank Base Rate
11	----	Model Set 7 + Administration Change

For both countries, the initial or base model included only the five composite variables measuring question aggressiveness and a linear trend variable which measures the amount of time that has passed beginning with the first conference. A quadratic linear trend term was also included.

The second through fifth set of models adds the individual economic indicators (Prime/Base Rate, CPI, DOW/FTSE, Unemployment) and looks for significant outcomes with each individual economic indicator. For each model, if an added indicator proved significant or altered the effect of independent variables already present, it was retained in the next model set. If not, it was dropped from the final analysis after correcting for multiple testing across outcomes.

The sixth model introduced the measure for the executive approval rating, while model seven included the measure for foreign affairs. A separate analysis was also run with the approval rating indicator which did not include any economic variables, due to the high level of collinearity between the two. The approval rating variable remained insignificant, however. As the foreign affairs indicator proved meaningful in the UK analysis, a series of interaction terms were introduced to test for interaction

effects between questions concerning foreign affairs and the other significant covariates. However, none of these interaction terms proved to be significant. For the US analysis, the foreign affairs indicator was not significant among any of the outcome measures, so interaction terms were not included.

The last model for both sets of analyses introduced the administration change indicator. In addition to the inclusion of this indicator was a series of administration interaction terms to test for differences in the relationship between the covariates and the outcome measures within specific administrations. However none of these variables or interaction terms proved to be significant, and were thus removed from the final models.

This ultimately yielded two final models containing all significant coefficients for each of the five outcome measures. Both the final US model and the final UK model will be discussed below within their individual contexts as well as within their comparative capacities.

This staged approach was utilized in order to account for the problems of collinearity between the economic indicators and approval ratings that (logically) occur. I have included two tables (**Table 6 and 7**) below which displays the relatively high level of collinearity between the covariates included in the analyses:

Table 6: Correlation Matrix for US Covariates

	Approval	Prime Rate	CPI	Dow	Unemploy.
Approval	**1.00**				
Prime Rate	-0.72	**1.00**			
CPI	-0.54	0.29	**1.00**		
Dow	-0.85	0.75	0.46	**1.00**	
Unemploy.	0.60	-0.75	0.13	-0.69	**1.00**

Table 7: Correlation Matrix for UK Covariates

	Approval	Prime Rate	CPI	Dow	Unemploy.
Approval	**1.00**				
Base Rate	0.20	**1.00**			
CPI	-0.41	-0.08	**1.00**		
FTSE	-0.05	0.66	0.46	**1.00**	
Unemploy.	-0.27	-0.62	0.69	0.01	**1**

As is evident, a number of measures have a high degree of collinearity (<.7) with both the approval ratings and economic indicators. This is more prevalent in the US analysis, however. In lieu of factor analyses, I conducted the staged approach discussed earlier, in order to identify relationships between specific indicators and the outcome variables. A separate set of analyses was conducted utilizing factor analysis, which yielded a single factor consisting of the US prime interest rate and the Dow Jones index. This factor, which was loosely identified as "Wall Street Conditions" yielded high factor loadings (<.8). However, when included in the analysis, the explanatory power of the specific economic indicators was lost, and the latent variable of Wall Street conditions is difficult to interpret at best . Similar results were obtained when the process was repeated with the UK portion of the analysis. This staged approach, utilized by Clayman et al. (2007) in their analysis of conditions of aggressive questioning in US news conferences, not only allowed me to identify the relationships between the measures of aggressive questioning and specific economic indicators, it also provided me with more opportunities for direct comparison between my own results and the findings of Clayman et al. The problem of multicollinearity, however, still remains an important issue that needs to be addressed in future research.

An additional analysis was conducted for each nation which included all covariates, but this did not yield anything significant. This is more than likely due to the problem of multicollinearity discussed earlier.

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Chapter 3

Results

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Below, I will present my findings in three phases, with the first section looking at general trends in journalist aggressiveness during the period of analysis, the second section focusing on historical trends in the development and implementation of the executive press conference, and the third section focusing on the conditions of aggressive questioning in executive news conferences.

General Trends

Independent of the statistical analysis focusing on aggressive questioning and its possible determinants is the simple question regarding general levels of journalist aggressiveness within and between the United States and the United Kingdom. Reported below are a series of graphs (**Figures 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6**) which capture the general levels of journalist aggressiveness in executive news conferences over time. Each graph utilizes one of the five composite outcome measures, while the sixth graph contains a single composite measure encompassing all five measures.

As is evident in **Figure 1**, general levels of question initiative in executive press conferences remains relative similar, although UK levels are slightly higher. This is not entirely unsurprising given the fact that the executive press conference format in the UK had not yet become routinized. This is important, as the field of interaction had yet to become well-defined, meaning that features of higher levels of initiative, such as question prefacing, multiple questions, and follow-up questions would not be associated with problems such as avoidance. In the US, however, the risk of a journalist isolating oneself within the field of interaction is readily apparent and may limit their opportunities to ask further questions.

What is immediately clear in **Figures 2, 3, and 5** is that many of the essential characteristics of aggressive questioning (Directness, Assertiveness, Accountability) maintain comparable levels during the period of analysis. What is also interesting are the similarities in fluctuation across time,

which is likely indicative of the similar political and economic conditions occurring in both the US and UK.
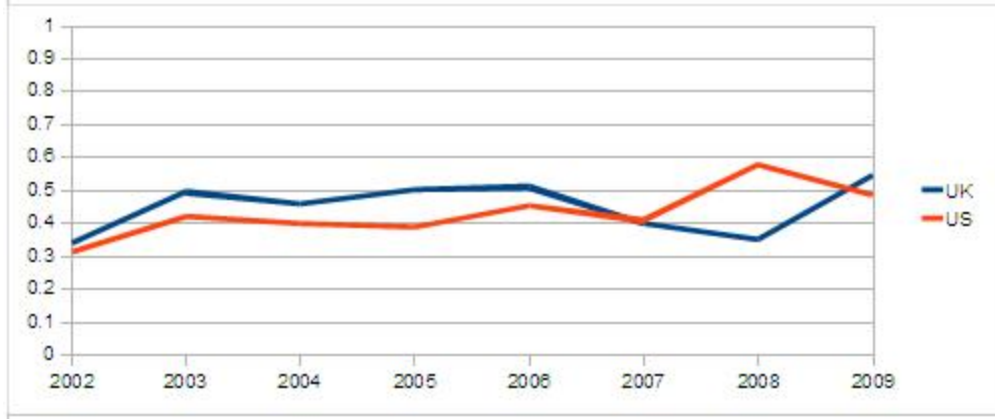
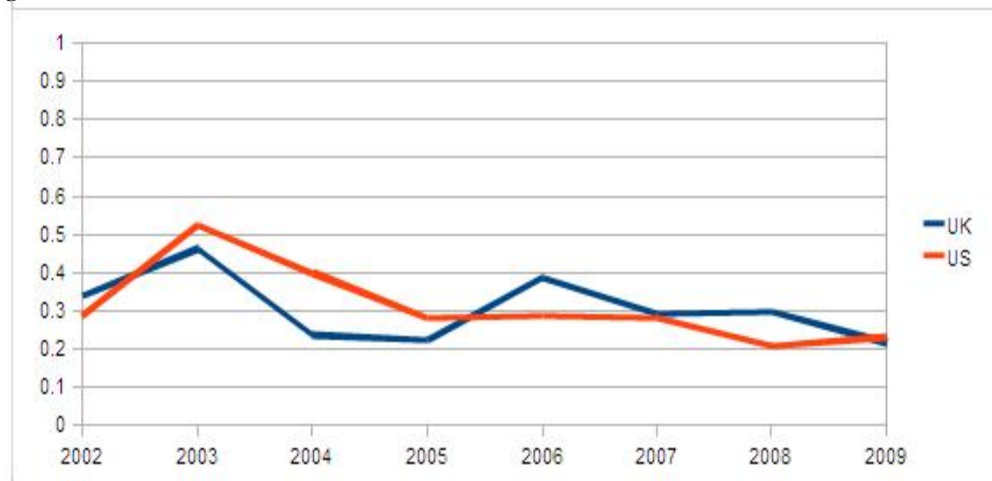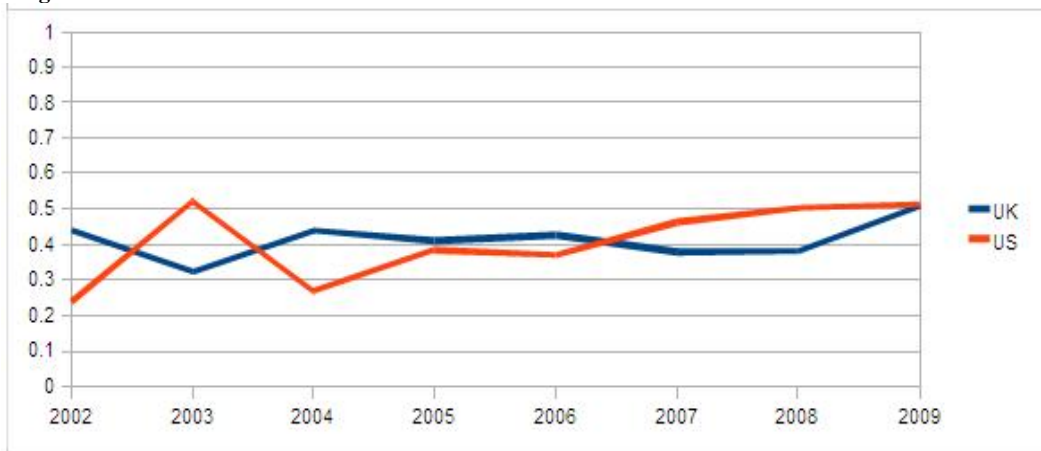**Figure 1:** Initiative Over Time
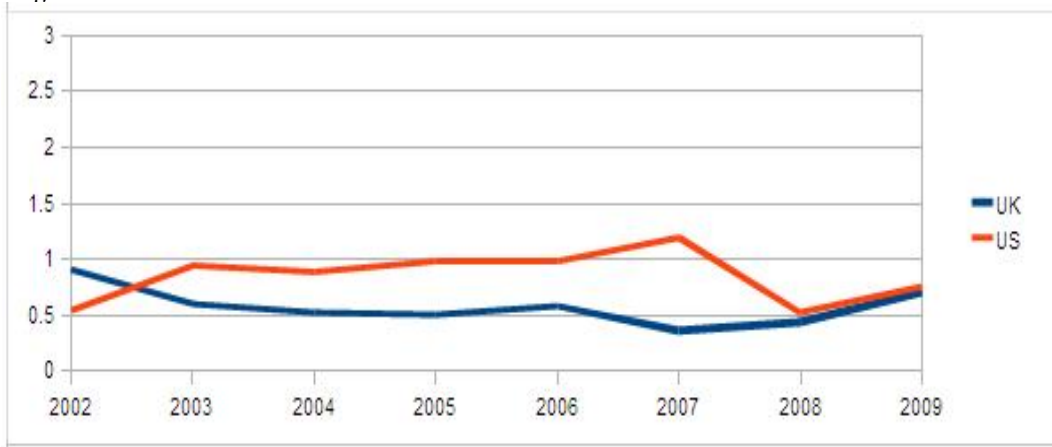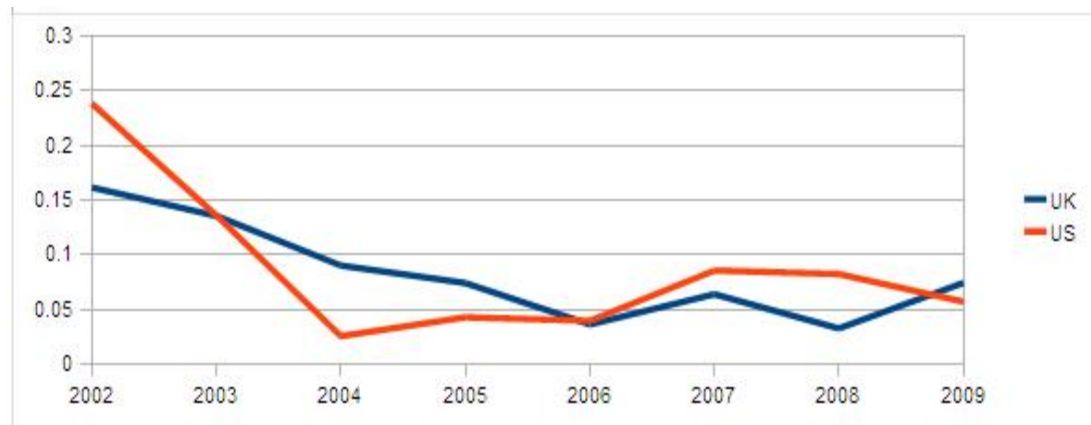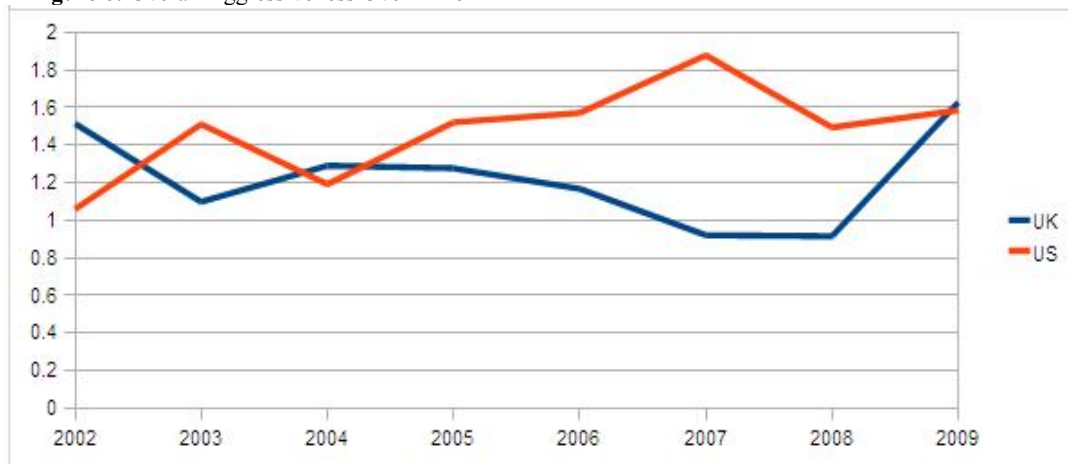

Figure 2: Directness Over Time

Figure 3: Assertiveness Over Time

Figure 4: Adversarialness Over Time

Figure 5: Accountability Over Time

Figure 6: Overall Aggressiveness Over Time

While not immediately clear from the first five graphs, the Figure 6 demonstrates the effect of the higher levels of question adversarialness experienced in the US upon general levels of aggressiveness. When collapsed into a single indicator, the minute disparities between the US and the UK increase, suggesting that levels of aggressive questioning tend to be higher in the US than in the UK, although those levels converge by 2009, which can likely be attributed to a variety of historical events occurring at that time. This finding is surprising when placed within the context of previous research and anecdotal evidence regarding what was considered to be remarkably high levels of journalist aggression in the UK. Conversely, the heightened US levels of aggressiveness are not entirely unsurprising considering the previous findings of Clayman et al. regarding the general trends towards increasing overall aggressiveness.

Linear Trends

Independent of the general levels of aggressiveness is the fluctuation of aggressive questioning patterns. Table 8 below displays the results of the initial linear trend models. Note that to interpret the odds ratios (ORs), anything significantly greater than one suggests a positive association, while anything significantly less than one reflects a negative association. To interpret the magnitude of

the relationship, ORs signify the amount by which the odds of a higher rather than lower level of the outcome occurring are multiplied for each unit of a given predictor, after controlling for any other predictors included in the model. As the results in Table 8 demonstrate, linear trends appear to be associated with only a few of the dimensions of question aggressiveness for both the US and the UK, although this could be due to the brevity of the time frame under analysis. Regardless, those dimensions that are significantly associated with linear trends still provide a interesting look at the shifts in journalist aggressiveness in both the US and the UK.

In the US, the dimensions of aggressive questioning that are associated with time include assertiveness, adversarialness, and accountability. Not surprising are the results which suggest that both assertiveness and adversarialness are continually increasing over time, although the magnitude of those increases are relatively small. However, as mentioned before, previous findings have already suggested that journalist' questioning methods were increasingly becoming aggressive across all dimensions. Also included in the analysis was a quadratic time variable. While this proved insignificant for assertiveness, there does appear to be a *very* small association between adversarialness and the quadratic time variable, suggesting that the rate at which levels of adversarialness are increasing begin to decline towards the end of the the time frame under analysis. More surprising is the relatively dramatic drop in accountability-style questions over the course of the Bush Administration. The inclusion of the quadratic time variable suggests, however, that the rate at which accountability levels were declining begins to decrease.

Fewer dimensions of aggressive questioning appeared to be associated with linear trends in the UK, although the dimensions that are associated, Adversarialness and Accountability, are indicative of an overall declining level of aggressiveness following the establishment of US-style executive news conferences. This finding supports the hypothesis that, while a culture of journalist aggressiveness may indeed exist within the UK news media, the routinization of the executive press conference has followed a similar path as that of "Question Time." Both adversarialness and accountability demonstrated similar outcomes in relation to the linear trend variable, as both measures of

aggressiveness appear to decline slightly over time. Neither of these measures was associated with the included quadratic time variable, however.

Table 8. Linear Trends in Aggressiveness 2002-2009

	Predictor	Outcome				
		Initiative	**Directness**	**Assertiveness**	**Adversarialness**	**Accountability**
United States	Time	-----	-----	More Assertive	More Adversarial	Less Accountable
	Odds ratio	-----	-----	1.1	1.79	.40
	p value	-----	-----	.03	<..001	.003
	Time-squared	-----	-----	-----	Less Adversarial	More Accountable
	Odds ratio	-----	-----	-----	.99	1.003
	p value	-----	-----	-----	.002	.007
United Kingdom	Time	-----	-----	-----	Less Adversarial	Less Accountable
	Odds ratio	-----	-----	-----	.89	.843
	p value	-----	-----	-----	.01	.01
	Time-squared	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
	Odds ratio	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
	p value	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

Table 9. Predictors of Aggressive Questioning in US Presidential news conferences

Condition	Predictor	Outcome				
		Initiative	**Directness**	**Assertiveness**	**Adversarialness**	**Accountability**
Linear Trends	Linear Trend	-----	-----	More Assertive	More Adversarial	Less Accountable
	Odds ratio	-----	-----	1.08	1.44	.262
	p value	-----	-----	.02	.05	<.001
	Time-squared				Less Adversarial	More Accountable
	Odds ratio	-----	-----	-----	.998	1.005
	p value	-----	-----	-----	.05	<.001
Economic Context	Dow	-----	-----	-----	-----	More Accountable
	Odds ratio	-----	-----	-----	-----	1.52
	p value	-----	-----	-----	-----	.007

Table 10. Predictors of Aggressive Questioning in UK Prime Minister news conferences

Condition	Predictor	Outcome				
		Initiative	Directness	Assertiveness	Adversarialness	Accountability
Linear Trends	Time	-----	-----	-----	Less Adversarial	Less Accountable
	Odds ratio	-----	-----	-----	.86	.844
	p value	-----	-----	-----	<.001	.037
	Time-squared	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
	Odds ratio	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
	p value	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

Economic Context	Unemployment rate	-----	-----	-----	More Adversarial	-----
	Odds ratio	-----	-----	-----	1.21	-----
	p value	-----	-----	-----	.02	-----
	Bank Base rate	Less Initiative	-----	-----	-----	-----
	Odds ratio	.81	-----	-----	-----	-----
	p value	.03	-----	-----	-----	-----
Foreign Affairs	Foreign/Military Qs	-----	-----	Less Assertive	Less Adversarial	-----
	Odds ratio	-----	-----	.71	**.75**	-----
	p value	-----	-----	.008	**.09***	-----
Popularity	Approval Rating	-----	-----	Less Assertive	-----	-----
	Odds ratio	-----	-----	**.99**	-----	-----
	p value	-----	-----	**.07***	-----	-----

Conditions of Aggressiveness

Tables 9 and 10 display the results of the final models for each of the countries of analysis. Note that only the variables which remained significant are reported here.

Despite previously demonstrated associations with both the measures of unemployment and the prime interest rate, as well as a noted decline in certain features of aggressive questioning when the subject of the question dealt with foreign/military affairs, only a single covariate proved to be significant in the US portion of the analysis, and only in relation to a single outcome measure. What is even more interesting is the direction of the relationship, as there appears to be a positive association between the Dow Jones Index and levels of Accountability. Though not particularly strong, this relationship is nonetheless important, primarily for its status as the *only* demonstrated relationship. None of the other economic measures, nor the approval rating, appears to be associated with levels of aggressive questioning, at least during the period of analysis. The previously reported linear trends remained, however, even after controlling economic conditions and approval ratings. The separate factor analysis that was briefly discussed earlier (which collapsed the Prime Interest Rate and the Dow Index) yielded some interesting findings, which, while significant, are difficult to interpret. What they suggest, however, is that the measures of initiative, assertiveness, and adversarialness are all influenced by a latent variable which measures the conditions on Wall Street. This will be discussed in greater detail below.

The UK portion of the analysis proved to be a bit more complex, and provided a greater degree of information. In terms of the economic context, two covariates proved to be significant, although both covariates were only associated with a single outcome measure. Unsurprisingly, the unemployment rate appears to be positively associated with higher levels of adversarial questioning. The Bank Base rate, on the other hand, is negatively associated with levels of question initiative, although this finding also makes sense intuitively, as during the period of analysis, the Bank Base rates dropped to address troublesome economic conditions. Neither of these relationships are particularly strong though. Foreign Affairs questions were also less assertive and less adversarial, although relationship between Adversarialness and foreign affairs was only significant at the .09 level. However, given the dearth of

associations present, it seems worthwhile to acknowledge. These relationships also appear to remain stable over time and under different economic circumstances, as evidenced by the lack of interaction effects present between the foreign indicator and the other covariates included. Although not strong (nor entirely significant, as p= .07), there does appear to be a negative relationship between Prime Minister popularity and journalist assertiveness. This relationship, however, is extremely weak at best, as the OR is so close to 1 as to be trivial. Linear trends remained, both in direction and strength, even after controlling for economic conditions and approval ratings.

To summarize, the only predictor that proved to be significant in the US context was the Dow Jones Index, which was associated with higher levels of question accountability (Although a latent "Wall Street" variable appears to influence journalist behavior as well). Unexplained linear trends remain. The strongest predictor of journalist aggressiveness in Prime Ministerial news conferences appears to be the unemployment rate, followed by question context and the Bank Base rate. Unexplained linear trends remain and there appears to be a very weak association between approval ratings and question assertiveness.

Chapter 4

Discussion

Although the nature of this analysis is a comparative one, the results at the individual level are still somewhat surprising, particularly because this type of analysis has not yet been conducted in areas beyond the United States.

United States

The most surprising aspect of the analysis of US executive news conferences is the general lack of coherence between previous studies on presidential news conferences and these current results. What these findings suggest is that, while general levels of aggressiveness are continuing to increase, the degree to which external conditions influence the shape of aggressive questioning patterns has dropped. This is particularly troubling when the findings of Clayman et al. (2007) demonstrated a relatively high level of correlation between external conditions and aggressive questioning practices. When taken into consideration alongside the popular mythology regarding the role of the media as a check to state power, and as a representative of the public, one cannot help but wonder if the encroaching routinization of journalist interactions, as well as the associated advancement of technological rationality has positioned the news media is such a way as to insulate them from existing conditions. While such as a suggestion is likely overblown, the results of this analysis clearly suggest some degree of dissonance between journalist questioning tactics and external conditions, at least within the context of the contemporary executive press conference. However, as mentioned before, the inclusion of the "Wall Street" latent variable was indicative of the fact that US journalists do respond to conditions of economic health, but that the relationship is more complex that that of the UK.

What these findings also suggest is that the rather simple normative models of press behavior in the US are not satisfactory in portraying current media behavior. The slew of metaphors pertaining to "watchdogs," "attack dogs," and "lap dogs," all point towards simplistic models of press-

state relations, while the reality of the relationship is far more complex and dynamic. Just a quick

comparison between previous findings and these current trends of increasing aggressiveness and the

unintuitive relationship between higher levels of accountability and higher Dow Jones Index scores

suggest that the press-state relations are fluid and do not adhere well to static models. However, why the

dramatic shift, particularly during a a period in which opposition against the President was heightened

due to the prolonged war in Iraq and the reemergence of difficult economic conditions? Traditional

explanations may include anything from a "rally around the flag" effect following the events of

September 11th, 2001, although the continued increase in overall aggressiveness is not entirely congruent

with such an explanation, to the effect of continued economic pressures faced by the press to compete

against other news corporations and maintain their current standing, which may lead to forms of

dissonance between objective conditions such as the health of the economy or public opinion and

questioning practices and topics that journalists are apt to adopt. This trend could also be a phenomena

associated particularly with the Bush Administration, and the atmosphere of interaction that developed

between the press and the presidency. Regardless, the lack of robust results should not suggest that these

findings are in any way insubstantial, as they also illuminate certain features of the UK press, which will

be discussed in more detail later.

United Kingdom

As the first look at journalist questioning practices in UK executive press conferences,

these results are particularly surprising in relation to the general belief that a culture of aggressiveness is

prevalent in the British press. Though, as discussed earlier, there has been documented evidence and

anecdotal incidences of increased journalist aggressiveness, as well as the mere fact that the emergence of

regular UK executive press conferences has been attributed to those rising levels of journalist

aggressiveness, overall levels of aggressive questioning practices remain comparatively low. However, as

hypothesized, initial levels of question aggressiveness, at least in terms of question adversarialness and

accountability, appear to decline over time. Considering that this relationship remains even while

controlling for external factors which have demonstrated a steady decline of economic health and prime ministerial popularity, a plausible explanation for this decline could be attributed to the increasing routinization of the press conference interaction, as the field of interacts begin to constitute the boundaries and limitations of aggressive questioning. Furthermore, as discussed earlier, a similar trend was reported regarding "Question Time" in Parliament. What began as a contentious setting in which the Prime Minister was required to answer to members of Parliament developed into a comparatively mild setting after the introduction of cameras and news agencies. This trend appears to reverse, however, when looking at Figure 6, as overall levels of aggressiveness appear to rise once more. Although without further research, little can be said about this sudden shift. An additional factor that may play a role in the difference in overall levels of aggressiveness could be the varying levels of political parallelism that exist in both nations. Because the British press system has a notably higher degree of political parallelism, one outcome could be a lower aggregate level of aggressive behavior, as the partisan press outlets who support the present administration could conceivably demonstrate lower levels of hostility, while the reverse may hold true for oppositional press outlets. Without more robust data that captures this information, it is impossible to determine, however.

Also interesting is the comparatively high level of impact external factors appear to have on journalist questioning practices in the UK. Even more interesting is the fact that the dimensions over which these external factors are associated are remarkably similar to those of the US press system between the years of 1953-2000. Whether or not this is simply coincidental, it does appear to be the case that UK journalists participating in executive news conferences are influenced by multiple external factors representing both economic/social conditions and public opinion.

The UK economic indicators that proved to be significant included both the Bank Base Rate and the Unemployment rate, suggesting that the UK press is responsive to conditions in both the market and on the street. Both indicators appear to share a similar magnitude, as lower Bank Base Rates equate with a greater likelihood for higher levels of initiative, while increases in the unemployment rate are associated with a greater likelihood for higher levels of adversarialness. These relationships suggest

two important things regarding the UK press system; namely, that the press' sensitivity to economic conditions is multidimensional, and that sensitivity does not appear to be tilted towards either "market" or "street" level indicators. The influence of public opinion, while skirting the edge of significance, is indicative of possibly higher levels of aggressiveness (in this case assertiveness) when the Prime Minister's approval rating dips, suggesting that the influence of public opinion, while correlated with indicators of economic health, still maintains some independent effect on journalist questioning practices.

Greater levels of journalistic deference arise, however, when questions regarding foreign issues are raised. This relationship has been identified in a similar context before, as US journalists also appeared to increase their levels of restraint when broaching questions dealing with foreign affairs. However, this finding is nonetheless surprising, given existing interpretations of UK press behavior.

Comparisons

While the results from each analysis are individually interesting, the true value of the study emerges when the results are taken into context with one another. As previous research on journalist aggressiveness focused solely on the behavior of US journalists, interpreting the magnitude of aggressive questioning tactics was based primarily upon assumptions, however accurate they may be. With the inclusion of a comparable analysis beyond the scope of the US news media, the distinctions between aggressive questioning tactics and the role of the press become more sharply defined. What is immediately clear from the two sets of analyses and the comparison of aggregate levels of question aggressiveness is that the UK press does not turn out to have higher levels of aggressive questioning, nor do they resemble the "attack dog" model of an adversarial press that is commonly assumed. Granted, the setting in which the analysis is being conducted is too minute to claim any significant degree of generalizablity, but the direct interaction which takes place between journalists and the executive does serve as a reasonable proxy for understanding certain features of state-press relations.

When directly comparing the magnitude of aggressive questioning tactics between the US and the UK, it is evident that the US press, while often accused of serving the interests of the government, is

remarkably hostile towards the executive in the press conference setting. Furthermore, secular trends suggest a continued rise in aggressive questioning, which supports and continues the findings of Clayman et al. (2007) that suggest increasing overall aggressiveness. When juxtaposed against the patterns evident in UK executive press conferences, the nature of US journalists' hostility is all the more apparent. As is clear from the third portion of the analysis, only a single covariate included in the model proved to be significant, and yielded a relationship that is confusing at best. So how do we account for this continued increase in US journalist hostility? Earlier research points to rise of adversarial journalism in the US beginning in the 1970s (Hallin 1992; Hart et al. 1990; Patterson 1993). However, this was attributed to declining trust in the presidency due to the occurrence of events such as the Watergate scandal and the Vietnam War. Clayman et al. (2007) suggests that, due to their findings regarding the relationship between US journalist aggressiveness and salient economic indicators, economic conditions played a key role in the emergence of a more adversarial press in the 1970s, as as economic conditions were far from ideal (i.e. persistent stagflation). While that my indeed be the case, it appears that there are other factors involved in determining journalist questioning tactics. It is beyond the scope of this analysis, however, to identify those. Regardless, the results presented here suggest that a new phase of press adversarialness is emerging that is conditioned by new factors, such as the increasing amount of economic pressure placed upon the news media industry. Another possible explanation could be that, due to the increased amount of interaction between journalists and consumers via new communications technology, journalists are offered a wider array of topics to address. If this is indeed the case, it would mean that, contrary to what the results of this analysis suggest, journalists have become more responsive to public concerns, but that due to the range and variety of these concerns as they are expressed via new communications medium afforded by the internet, factors such as economic conditions and presidential approval ratings are no longer able to adequately reflect those public concerns. Alternatively, the US press may simply be developing a new form of adversarial culture, such as the one identified in the UK (although not entirely corroborated by the results of this analysis).

Although the analysis of journalist aggressiveness in UK executive news conferences only covers a period 7 years and does not have a analog by which to compare it to the trends in US executive news conferences over the period of 1953-2002, a comparison between the US results and the UK results still reveal important features of the UK press system that call into question existing assumptions regarding the behavior of the UK press. Though lacking in historical precedent, the emergence of the regular Prime Ministerial press conference demonstrates the relative levels of journalist aggressiveness. Surprisingly, those levels are lower than anticipated. Also surprising is the degree to which the UK press appears to be responsive to the more "traditional" measures of economic health and public opinion, as they are remarkably similar to the trends identified by Clayman et al. (2007) in their study of Presidential news conferences between 1953-2000. What this contemporary comparison suggests is that, at least to the degree in which the quantifiable measures chosen properly reflect factors which should influence press behavior, the UK press system more closely adheres to the "watchdog" or "fourth estate" model of the press. This, of course, begs the question as to why the US and UK press systems differ so dramatically along these dimensions, especially considering that US trends in journalist questioning practices suggested similar outcomes by as late as 2000. Is it a function of the structural differences that currently exist between the two media systems? Or could it be due to the fact that the regular press conferences have only begun as an institutional feature of state-press relations in the UK, and that further research of journalist questioning practices will reveal a similar pattern as UK executive press conference becomes routinized and institutionalized? In order to address these questions, further research is necessary to investigate both the shifts and trends in US and UK journalist behavior, as well as a broader scope of state-press relations as they exist in other countries that utilize a regular executive press conference structure. This will allow a deeper understanding of the magnitude of aggressive behavior as well as the changing dynamics of state-press-public relations. Additional directions for this type of research also include the possibility of studying the relationship between journalist questioning practices, and the executive's response. This line of research can also be extended into a comparative framework that will

further help to elucidate the relationship that exists between the state and the press across various contexts.

While these findings do suggest the need for a reinterpretation, or even a dismissal, of the dominant "model" paradigm for understanding press systems, there are a number of limitations present in this research that need to be addressed. Because language usage is paramount in this study, it is of primary importance that the level of comparability between languages (even two forms of English) be relatively high. In this analysis, the methods for coding aggressiveness in questioning practices were developed with American English in mind. Due to the cultural differences between forms of US and UK speech , some variation between the two languages is bound to occur within the realm of aggressive questioning practices. Further research should help to clarify this difference, and to identify ways through which to account for it.

Additional problems arise when measuring general levels of aggressive questioning practices, due to the previously and currently identified secular trends of increasing aggressiveness in everyday forms of talk. Whether or not this general increase is limited to journalists is of utmost importance in determining the major differences between US and UK journalist behavior, as is the need to identify whether or not these general secular trends are occurring at similar rates in both countries of analysis. Without a deeper understanding of the general cultural shifts and the unique historical development of language in each nation, my findings are limited to a rough estimation regarding general trends in journalist aggressiveness.

One final thing to consider while interpreting my results is the limited nature of the executive press conference. While I have attempted to demonstrate it's importance within the realm of press-state relations, there are obviously a wide variety of press-state interactions that occur. Thus, it is important to keep in mind that this research has been able to demonstrate only a small piece of this evolving relationship, and any inferences made to the greater press system are limited. This should not, however, diminish the importance of these findings.

Conclusions

        As the first quantitative comparative analysis of journalism as it is practiced in executive news conferences, the implications of this study are two-fold. By using journalists' questions drawn from a sample covering a 7-year period that traces the emergence of the regular executive news conference in the UK, this analysis has illuminated features of both the US and UK press systems and the dominant models under which journalist behavior is subsumed. The analysis, which consisted of a multidimensional framework to measure the aggressiveness of journalists' questions, demonstrated that, in the US, previous patterns of journalist behavior have not continued, and that US journalists, though increasingly aggressive, no longer appear to modulate their behavior on the basis of previously robust indicators measuring both economic health and public opinion. In the UK, this analysis has called into question the dominant assumptions regarding journalist aggressiveness, as UK journalists appear to demonstrate lower levels of overall question aggressiveness. Simultaneously, contemporary UK journalists' behavior more closely resembles that of past US journalists' behavior, and demonstrates a greater level of adherence to the "watchdog" model of the press that serves as a salient feature of both US and UK press systems. Though previous research was able to link US journalist behavior with the fluctuations of the business cycle, contemporary US journalist practices appear to be influenced by other factors that were not captured in this analysis, which may require the development of new models of press-state behavior, as the current models appear generally inadequate to account for these changes.

        Beyond the results of the analysis is the introduction of a (relatively) new methodological approach to the field of comparative media studies. This approach has already been demonstrated as useful when comparing two distinct media systems, as it was able to capture differences in journalist behavior that are difficult to explore in an objective and reliable comparative framework. Further research utilizing this approach could feasibly provide another dimension through which to compare media systems at both the micro and macro level, given proper adaption. There are limitations, however, as this approach currently requires that comparable framework of executive press conferences exist.

Regardless, this analysis should provide the groundwork through which more contextual comparisons can be made.

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